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A Tudor Manuscript Granting Livery to the King's "Shakbots"

Corresponding author

Trevor Herbert

Professor of Music Research, The Royal College of Music. London SW7 2BS, UK

trevor.herbert@rcm.ac.uk

A Tudor manuscript granting livery to the King's 'Shakbots'

Trevor Herbert

A manuscript bought privately by the collector Evan Holzwasser will be of interest to readers of this journal. It was written in 1533 and has monetary value because it contains the signature of King Henry VIII, at that time in the fifteenth year of his reign. I was contacted by Mr Holzwasser for advice about the persons mentioned in the manuscript and am grateful to him for his permission to publish this short article with a reproduction of the manuscript and its transcription.

The manuscript has had several previous owners, but at one time it was part of the Henry Spiro Collection. It was described thus in the Christies catalogue at the London auction of that collection in December 2003

HENRY VIII, King of England (1509-1547). Document signed ('Henry R'), a warrant to Lord Windsor, Keeper of the Wardrobe, Westminster, 14 December 1533, signed by the King at the head, 15 lines written in brown ink on vellum, one membrane, 160 x 240 mm, papered impression of the royal signet seal (small hole in left margin, ownership stamp on verso).

An order to provide livery for six of the King's sackbut players: Mark Anthony, Peregrine Symon, Nicholas Shakbote, Lewes Vincle, Nicholas Andrewe and Anthony Symon. Each of the 'shakbotes' is allowed 'fowertene yards of chamlet for a gowne price evry yarde iii s iiij d It[em] to evry of them a furre of blak boggy [lamb's skin] for every of their gownes price every furre four pownde It[em] to every of them eight yards of Damaske for a Jaquet price every yarde viii s ... thre yards of velvet for a dublet'.¹

[image of the manuscript to be put here or near here]

The full transcription from the original sixteenth century secretary hand is as follows

By the king

Henry R

We woll and co[m]maunde you forthwith upon the sight of these o[ur] l[ett]res that ye delyvre or do to bee delyvred unto o[ur] welbeloved s[e]rvants Marke Anthony, Peregryne Symon, Nicholas Shakbote, Lewes Vincle, Nicholas Andrewe, and Anthony Symon our Shakbots these p[ar]cells folowing. First unto ev[r]y of them fowretene yards of chamlet for a gowne price ev[r]y yarde iijs iiij d It[em] to ev[r]y of them a furre of blak boggy for ev[r]y of their gownes price ev[r]y furre fowre pownds It[e]m to ev[r]y of them eight yards of Damaske for a Jaquet price ev[r]y yarde viij s It[em] to ev[r]y of them asmoche coton as woll suffice to lyne ev[r]y of the said Jaqwetts It[e]m to ev[r]y of them thre[e] yards of velwet for a dublet price ev[r]y yarde xij s iiij d It[e]m to ev[r]y of them asmoche fustian and canvas as woll suffice to lyne ev[r]y of the said Dubletts It[e]m to ev[r]y of them thre[e] yards of velwet for garding of their said gownes price ev[r]y yarde xij s iiij d And these o[ur] l[ett]res shalbe yo[ur] sufficient warrant and discharge in this behalf Yeven under our Signet at o[ur] Manor of Westminster the xiiijth day of December the xxvth yere of our Reigne

¹ I am grateful to Mr Holzwasser for allowing me to reproduce this information including information about the manuscript's provenance.

To our Right trusty and Welbeloved
Counsaillo[ur] the Lord Windesore
Keper
of our greate Warederobe²

It is no more than an administrative document, one of the many that reveal processes with which Tudor civil servants routinely engaged. It provides no new information, in fact the document is listed and briefly summarised in Andrew Ashbee's multi-volume *Records of English Court Music*.³ However, documents relating to musicians from this period are particularly valuable because the sequence of monthly wage lists are incomplete for the period between 30 April 1531 and 28 February 1537/8.

The warrant is from the office of the King to the Keeper of the Great Wardrobe, the office responsible for royal clothing and furnishing. The surface information it contains is obvious: it requests materials to provide a group of musicians with the livery of the court. Six players are named and each is a trombone (shakbote) player⁴, but what else does the document tell us? What did the granting of livery mean at this time? Where did these players come from how did they fit into the infrastructure of the court as a musical institution: does the document evidence continuity or change or provide information about musical practices in England at this time?

The players

The document names six players 'Marke Anthony, Peregryne Symon, Nicholas Shakbote, Lewes Vindle, Nicholas Andrew, and Anthony Symon.' They are described not as musicians or minstrels, but more precisely as 'our Shakbots'. These names are rendered in different forms and spellings in other court documents, but sense is easily made of them: we know something about each of these men. The information that follows relies largely, but not entirely on information contained in Ashbee's *Records...* and *A Biographical Dictionary of English Court Musicians 1485-1714*.⁵

Three of the players, Mark Anthony, Perygryne Symon, Lewis [van] Winkle are listed in wages lists as trombone players in 1529 by which time each had been in the service of the court for at least four years. The man described as 'Nicolas Shakbote' is probably Nicholas Forceval. I make this assumption because he is listed as a trombone player in other documents before and after 1533. The only other 'Nicholas' who is mentioned as a trombone players at this time, Nicholas Andrew is already accounted for in the manuscript.

Mark Anthony was a Venetian, in earlier documents he is called Mark Antonio. He should not be confused with Mark Anthony Bassano the first descendant of the patriarch Jeronimo Bassano who entered the King's service later in the decade. This Mark Anthony probably Mark Anthony Petala, a trombone player who arrived in London between 1521 and 1525. He had also been granted livery in 1529. References to him in court documents are frequent and of such a varied nature that it is

² Cite transcription

³ Andrew Ashbee *Records of English Court Music* Scolar Press Aldershot 1993 Vol VII p.70. The manuscript is calendared as part of the Wardrobe Accounts E101 / 421/ 16, 18-19 Hen VIII [signifying the eighteenth year of the reign of the king]

⁴ I refrain from using the word 'sackbut' in favour of trombone because the modish use of 'sackbut' in modern times is potentially confusing and should not be given additional status in an article such as this. Sackbut was simply an English expression for trombone and (as is exemplified in this article) was hardly ever rendered in that spelling.

⁵ Ashbee A and Lasocki D *A Biographical Dictionary of English Court Musicians 1485-1714* (2 Vols) Adershot: Ashgate 1998

possible that he held a senior position, at least the lead trombone player and perhaps responsible for wind instruments more generally.

Perygrene Symon (Simon) was from Padua, he also used the alias Mayhou. Aliases were not uncommon and were often employed to camouflage a Jewish identity. He arrived in London at the same time as Petala with four other Italians who were at that time counted among the group referred to as 'the new sacbuts'. Each was in receipt of monthly wages of 40 shillings. Perygrene stayed, he died in London in 1541/2.

Lewes van Winkle was another who entered the King's service between 1521 and 1525. He is presumed to be the father or brother of another Flemish musician Jan van Winkle who also recruited to the King's music from the Low Countries. Lewes was despatched to London, apparently at the request of the King and on the recommendation of Hans Nagle who was a trombone player in the service of the King's father Henry VII.⁶ Van Winkle is missing from the payments lists after 1537 and is assumed to have moved elsewhere or died.

Nicholas Andrew was a relatively recent recruit to the King's music, he is not mentioned before 1531 when he was counted among the 'new sackbuts'. Little is known of his origins, but it is more likely that he was Flemish than English. He remained in the King's music for at least two decades and was one of the group granted livery for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1558/9. He died in London in 1564.

Nicholas Forceville (who also used the given name Claise or Clays) was another of the Flemish musicians recruited by Henry VIII on the recommendation of Nagle. He may also have been responsible for the import of instruments from Nuremberg. He was receiving payments as a trombone player in 1531 and was listed as a resident of Southwark, London in 1535. He continued to receive payments as a trombone player to 1540 and died in 1541.

Anthony Symon (Simon) was probably a son or brother of Peregryn. Both were Jewish and came from Padua. He had entered the King's service relatively recently but was to remain in the royal band for the rest of his life. His position became consolidated on the death of Forceville in 1540 when he and Nicolas Andrew took over his duties and shared the wages.

Trombones in the royal band

This is not the place for detailed analysis of the place of trombonists in the structure of the English court music in the early Tudor period, but a few words of context might be in order.⁷

The earliest known payment to trombonists in the English court is that which awards a month's wages to four (unnamed) players of the 'shakbushes' in May 1495.⁸ It is unlikely that the instrument was used in England greatly previous to that date.⁹ Five players described as 'sakbusshes and shalmeys' played at the funeral of Henry VIII's mother Queen Elizabeth and four were granted livery for the funeral of Henry VII and there are many references to trombonists in the reign of Henry VIII. Indeed following their first appearance trombonists were included in the court music establishment

⁶ %This is based on a reference in the accounts of the Court of Charles of Austria which records a payment to Hans Nagle and Hand Broen who are described as trombone players to the King of England

⁷ Additional information can be found in Herbert, Trevor 'Trombones and the English Court c.1480-c.1680', in Monika Lustig and Howard Weiner (Eds) *Posaunen und Trompeten* Stiftung Kloster Michaelstein, 2000 pp 31-9.

⁸ London, the British Library. Add Ms 7099

⁹ For information on minstrels in the English court before the Tudor dynasty see Richard Rastall 'The minstrels of the English Royal Household', Edward 1-Henry VIII: an Inventory'. *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicles* No 4 (1964) pp 1-41.

almost continuously until the Commonwealth period. They briefly feature at the time of the Restoration, but then declined to extinction by the end of the seventeenth century.

While Henry VII was well-attuned to the idea that the establishment of the court as a musical institution provided diplomatic advantage as well as pleasure, it was his son who developed court music to its highest point in the sixteenth century. Henry VIII was himself famously musical, but descriptions of his court often emphasised its modernity: he was a modern king and his court reflected modern cultural trends. It also reflected excellence, this is why it is likely that every trombone player working in the English court in the first half of the sixteenth century was a foreigner: there were no accomplished English trombone players so men had been recruited on the basis of their musical reputation and their knowledge of European repertoire and styles.

Our knowledge of these players is assisted by the fact that they were foreigners: they were required to be registered in the boroughs in which they lived. In modern times we would describe them as immigrants, but in the sixteenth century they were called 'aliens'. An alien with aspirations to progress to a status close to the modern state of nationalisation would petition to be a denizen. An alien was a legal immigrant who could own property, a denizen had the additional right to inherit property.¹⁰ The majority of court musicians obtained denizen status, this was particularly the case with those who were Jews.

The musical establishment of the Tudor court had some similarities with modern musical institutions such as opera houses. Some players were part of the regular establishment and could count on regular monthly wages and other benefits. Others were supernumeraries, essentially freelancers employed for a period or even a solitary occasion when an expansion of the forces was required. Some players who appear occasionally on the pay lists impressed enough to become members of the court music establishment.

The size of the regular court band is difficult to calculate because it changed at various points in the period and was expanded for special or cyclic occasions. What is clear however is that the idea of a permanent core band was understood? Players were appointed only when a vacancy existed, so for example, the appointment warrant of a new trombonist would usually state the name of the person whose vacancy through retirement, death or some other reason was being filled.

The Great Wardrobe, livery, its purpose and significance

The Great Wardrobe was founded in 1250.¹¹ Its purpose was to supply clothing and furnishings to the court. The English court was resident at any given time in one of several palaces in or near London. The Wardrobe was a large building in the City of London with easy access to the river for transport and surrounded by many small enterprises that made a living from manufacturing, supplying, exporting and importing textiles. A significant proportion of these mercers were Italian. The chief officer of the Wardrobe: the Keeper, was Sir Andrew Windsor who held the post from 1505-1543. He was appointed by and was responsible to the King. He was the administrator of one of the most important offices of the King's household. The Wardrobe was also important because of the influence it had on the quality and the economy of the London textile trade more generally.

¹⁰ For general information on the status of denizens and aliens in this period and a register of the domiciliary arrangements see Kirk REC and Kirk EF (Eds) 'Returns of Aliens dwelling in the City and suburbs of London from the reign of Henry VIII to that of James I'. *Publications of the Huguenot Society. Vol I* Aberdeen 1900

¹¹ Some scholars have suggested that the Wardrobe was established earlier in Henry III's reign which started in 1216.

Cloth for clothing was issued to all regular workers at the court, there are records of payments to the King's falconer, his standard bearers, even a payment to Thomas Cune the Sergeant Plumber and his fellow workers. However, the better livery was given to the 'above-stairs' staff. Musicians figure prominently in the wardrobe records, sometimes more prominently than they do in other accounts. For example in the 1543/44 accounts there are issues of cloth for four 'Gittern [cittern] players' who were attached (two each) to the king's ships *The Antelope* and *The Hind*. The same document orders cloth to be emblazoned with the Cross of St George to twelve cornett players who were, presumably, also destined for the high seas.

It follows that documents concerning the Wardrobe help trace the names of musicians and often what they played. Some entries are less helpful than others because they mention only minstrels, but several are more specific. In 1503 allowance is made for eight still (quiet) and five loud minstrels and the difference in the cloths issued seems to confirm that the former played indoors. The six mentioned in the 1533 document were to each wear the same livery - and it was not cheap. Each man was to have a doublet, jacket, and gown. The doublet was the main upper body garment, the jacket (also sometimes called a jerkin) was worn over the doublet and the gown was a loose fitted outer garment.

Damask the material for the doublet was a monochrome figured cloth, the contrasting faces of the weave created a reversible pattern, it was usually woven from satin.¹² Chamlet the material for the jacket and which is more properly written as 'camlet' was an eastern fabric that became imitated in European countries, Hayward describes it as a 'warp-faced tabby cloth with a pronounced weft rib, made of silk, wool, mohair or camel hair; it could incorporate a metal thread'.¹³ The gowns were to be dress in 'fur of blak boggy' and velvet was also used, all necessary cotton was to be supplied for all items. Linings were to be of canvas (an untreated cotton) and fustian (hemp or cannabis).¹⁴

Nothing is mentioned about colour in this warrant nor is there reference to hose, but this could have been because a black hose was standard and the colours of the court, (the Tudor colours were green and white) were well known to the recipients of the warrant anyway. The instruction that cornett players be given clothing that was emblazoned with the cross of St George (a red cross on a white background) may have been usual for sea duties. Black livery was worn for funerals and trumpeters sometimes wore scarlet for coronations and other high feasts. Heralds had trimmings of yellow on their gowns. Colours were important at court and some were reserved for the higher strata of courtiers. Indeed, it has been pointed out that the colouring of livery of the above-stairs staff of the court did much to chart the development of the privy chamber and particularly the significance of certain groups such as the chapel royal and the royal musicians.¹⁵

Some conclusions

The records of the music establishment of the English court in the sixteenth century are voluminous, but they continue to contain challenges for musicologists. The most important purpose of is to construct a profile that will allow the known musical forces to be matched against repertoire. This is

¹² My sources for much of the information about fabrics and the Wardrobe Office more generally is Hayward, Maria (Ed.) *The Great Wardrobe Accounts of Henry VII and Henry VIII*. London: London Records Society 2012

¹³ Ibid p.291

¹⁴ I have been unable to confirm the meaning of 'boggy'. It is not given in Hayward's glossary, neither is it given in *Oxford English Dictionary* to mean anything that would make sense in the context it is given here. Its translation as 'lamb's skin' is given by the authors of the Christies catalogue. Hemp (cannabis) was routinely used as a lining material for clothing in the sixteenth century.

¹⁵ Hayward p xii.

unlikely to be done with total exactitude because there are no known works of English music from the sixteenth century that have labelled parts for brass instruments. However, generalisation can be made with a fair degree of certainty, but only if one takes account of the very broad range of sources in its entirety. One sure generalisation is that musical life was rich, especially in the first half of the century and that trumpets and trombones were consistently prominent. Furthermore the presence of so many players – especially trombonists, who had established their careers outside England – almost certainly suggests that styles of performance were the subject of significant international influence, especially from Spain, Italy and the Low Countries.

But what do the records of the Wardrobe tell us that can particularly contribute to questions about musical performance? This depends on what the questions are, but a few broad statements are possible which are exemplified even by the short document that is the main subject of this article. The first is that documents that passed between the Wardrobe and the Court, taken with all the available administrative documents that survive contribute to the general picture of what the strength of the court musical establishment was and who was part of it. Some fragments found in Wardrobe documents might also have a unique quality in this story. One wonders for example whether that despatching of cornetto and cittern players to ships (mentioned above) was a common practice and if the type of livery issued carries a special meaning.

It could be argued that the allocation of liveries to individual players suggests the conferment of status. This may be true, it is certainly true that livery was an attractive perk and one not distributed lightly, but an element of circumspection is also required. The regular granting of liveries for certain individuals who were in receipt of monthly wages probably does confirm the status of certain players, but many livery orders were for special occasions and it was on such occasions that supernumeraries were often needed.

Possibly the most telling point about the Wardrobe is that for centuries such an institution existed because of a perceived need. Its function can be explained very simply as the office that supplied cloths and furnishings at the instruction of the monarch or the monarch's administrative representatives, but that is only the start of it. It had a special importance at several levels: it contributed to the leadership of court fashion, but one wonders for example, how many people relied directly or indirectly on this place for their livings and how many of them, like our six trombonists, travelled from foreign lands to find a better life. The evidence shows that there were many. Their work for the Royal Wardrobe set the standard for the appearance of courtly life. The English court was an elaborate stage on which the politics of fashion and culture merged with diplomacy. The King's band, the way it was seen as well as sounded, was a part of this process: it may even have been essential to it.